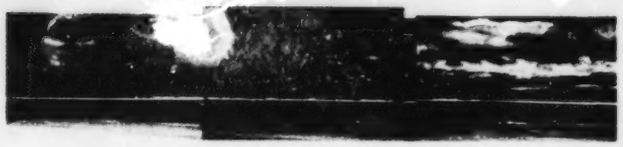

Spring Birds at Swan Haven

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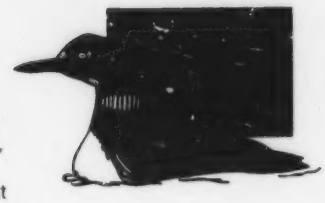
Welcome to M'Clintock Bay, a

critical habitat for waterbird spring migration. Here on the shores of Marsh Lake bird enthusiasts can watch Trumpeter and Tundra swans, Canada geese, Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintails, Bald Eagles and much more each spring. When the rest of the Yukon is covered with ice and snow, M'Clintock Bay has open water, giving these early spring migrants a safe resting place where plenty of food lies within reach on the muddy bottom. This important resting place gives swans, eager to reach nesting grounds, a refuge to wait for ponds to open further north. Ducks and geese take advantage of the food stirred up by the long-necked swans dabble for and feed alongside their large, white neighbours. Where there is prey, there are predators. Eagles find this area a good place to visit in spring, as do falcons and coyotes.

The teaming life on this small bay creates a wildlife spectacle not commonly seen, and birders new and experienced join in appreciating and observing at Swan Haven Interpretation Centre. As shorebirds and forest birds arrive in April, bird watching reaches a peak in late April and early May. Use this booklet to identify and learn more about some of the birds that frequent this place.

Loon

Gavia immer



Four different species of loons can be seen at M'Clintock Bay, the Common, Pacific, Red-throated and Yellow-billed. The Common Loon is the most often sighted. Loons are highly adapted to their aquatic lifestyle and have feet placed near the end of their bodies. This is efficient for swimming, but makes it awkward for loons to walk on land. Unlike all other birds, their bones are solid, giving them a specific gravity close to that of water. They can dive to depths of 60 metres in pursuit of fish and remain submerged for three minutes or more. Males and female loons wear the same plumage.

Grebe

Horned Grebe
Podiceps auritus

Red-necked Grebe
Podiceps grisegena

Grebes sleep, feed and nest on water. Like loons, their feet are placed near the end of their bodies for efficient swimming. They are identified by their pointy beaks, have straighter necks and are smaller than loons. Both Red-necked and Horned grebes have rich chestnut-coloured necks, but the Red-necked Grebe has black cheeks and throat and creamy-coloured ear tufts. Grebe males and females wear the same plumage and have ear crests or tufts in their breeding phase.

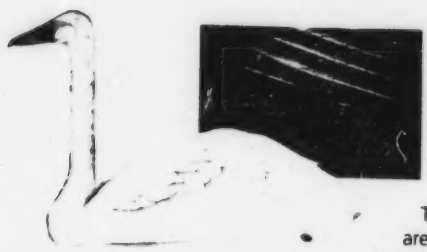
Tundra Swan

Cygnus columbianus

Tundra Swan populations are increasing in North America. The Pacific flyway population is about 63,000 birds, of which more than 1,000 can be seen at one time in M'Clintock Bay. Tundra and Trumpeter Swans look similar. A yellow teardrop-shaped spot in front of the eye distinguishes a Tundra Swan, but not all them have this mark. Voice is the best way to tell Tundra and Trumpeter Swans apart. Tundra Swans have a musical, wavering voice; they used to be called Whistling Swans. Male and female swans wear the same plumage year round. Immature Tundra Swans are a dull grey but they moult into adult plumage in their first autumn. Unlike ducks, swans will mature for a few years before they choose a mate. Swans mate for life, but they will replace a partner if one dies. Tundra Swans nest on the open tundra, near water in a large mound of grass and moss lined with down. They usually lay between three and five creamy-white eggs. Their average wingspan is 2 meters.

Trumpeter Swan

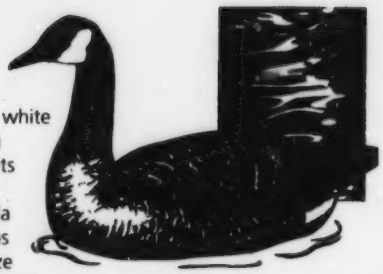
Cygnus buccinator



Trumpeter Swans are North America's largest species of waterfowl. The world population of Trumpeter Swans is only about 20,000, of which several thousand migrate through the south-western Yukon. These swans were nearly extinct at the end of the 19th century when they were hunted for their skins and quills. They have a deep voice that sounds like a trumpet. Unlike Tundra Swans, immature Trumpeters retain their grayish plumage in April and so are easily identified. Some Trumpeters have a salmon coloured line on top of their lower mandible. Trumpeter Swan's long necks allow them to feed in water up to one meter deep. They nest in wetlands in a huge mound of aquatic vegetation lined with down. Trumpeter usually produce between five and eight dull-white eggs. Their average wing span is 2.3 metres.

Goose

Branta canadensis



The black head-stocking and white cheek patches of the Canada Goose are as well known as its honking voice. Limited inter-breeding between the Canada Goose of different regions has lead to the great variety in size and proportion of this species. The most commonly seen goose at M'Clintock Bay is the Lesser Canada Goose. Like swans, geese mate for life and are very protective of their off-spring; the young do not separate from their parents until they return to the nesting grounds the following year.

Teal

Anas crecca

Green-winged Teal are one of the smallest ducks in Canada. Males and females are strikingly different; males are brightly patterned while females are better camouflaged. A bright green speculum distinguish Green-winged Teal from other ducks. Males also have a distinct russet-coloured head with a bold green patch behind the eye. They have an attractive high-pitched whistling voice. Teal are dabbling ducks, feeding on plant shoots and tubers by tipping up in the shallows.

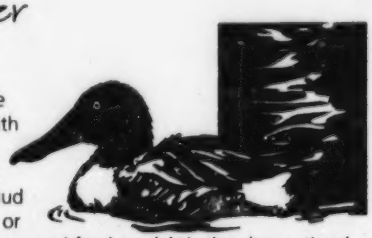
Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos

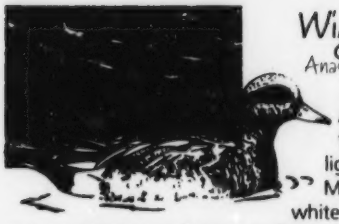
Male Mallard have green heads and necks with a narrow white collar and chestnut breast. Females are recognised by their iridescent blue speculum bordered front and back by a white line. Females have the classic duck quack. Mallard are adaptable to many different habitats. They are dabblers, feeding on aquatic plants, insects and mosquito larvae.

Northern Shoveler

Anas clypeata



The Northern Shoveler's huge spatula-shaped bill is lined with comb-like projections that allow it to sift plants, insects, snails and other food from mud and water. Sometimes three or four of these ducks will team up and feed on debris they have stirred up with their feet. Besides their easy to recognise bills, Northern Shoveler can be identified by their powder blue shoulder patch and green iridescent speculum. Northern Shoveler are dabbling ducks.



Wigeon

Anas americana

American Wigeon ride high in the water and seem to pivot lightly as they dabble for food. Males have a white crown and white belly that contrast sharply with their pinkish-brown breast. In flight the green speculum and white shoulder patch identifies the male. Females have a grey shoulder patch with a green speculum. They have a creamy head; neck streaked dusky-brown; white belly and russet breast. Males have a high-pitched whistling voice while females have a hoarse quack.

Ring-necked Duck

Aythya collaris

The Ring-necked Duck's most distinct ring is not the one around its neck, which is an inconspicuous chestnut colour, but the white one around its bill. Males also have a whitish triangle between their black chest and grey sides. The female has a whitish ring around the eye that may also extend back from the eye. Ring-necked duck are divers, usually feeding in the shallower water of marshes.

Canvasback

Aythya valisineria

Canvasback have long bills and sloping foreheads that set them apart from all other ducks. They are diving ducks and feed on aquatic invertebrates and crustaceans. Males have whitish back and a chestnut-coloured head and neck. Females have reddish-brown heads and necks with off-white on the chin, throat and around the eye. The male's courtship call is a quick high-pitched ick-ick and than a louder and more drawn-out coo.

Northern Pintail

Anas acuta

Northern Pintail are recognised by their pointed and long, slender necks. Males have a dark brown head and a white neck, which extends a thin white line towards the head. Females have creamy-brown heads streaked with black. Pintail are dabbling ducks and feed in shallow bodies of water, on grain fields and on stubble.

Scaup

Aythya affinis

The two species of Scaups, Greater and Lesser, are very similar. Male Greater Scaup have a greenish gloss. Lesser Scaup are slightly smaller than greater and have a white wing stripe that extends only to their secondary flight feathers (Greater Scaup's stripe extend to their primaries). All female Scaup have a whitish patch at the base of the bill that identifies them. Both species are diving feeders.

Goldeneye

Bucephala clangula

Common Goldeneye are one of the first ducks to arrive at M'Clintock Bay in the spring and one of the most frequently seen species. Male Barrow's Goldeneye look very similar to Common Goldeneye, only they have a large white crescent behind the base of the bill. Male Common Goldeneye have a round white spot behind the bill. Female Barrow's Goldeneye have a brighter yellow bill than Common Goldeneye females. Both species nest in natural cavities in trees, between two and 18 metres above the ground.

Bufflehead

Bucephala albeola

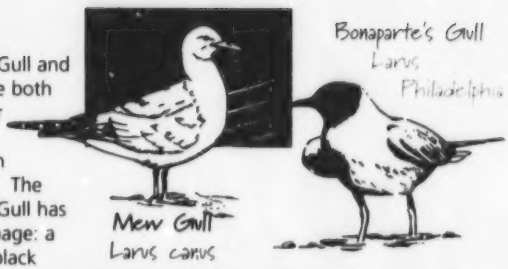
Bufflehead are small diving ducks. Males have a black head offset with a large white wedge starting below the eye and ending at the back of the head. Females are small and dark brown, with a small white patch on the side of the head. Bufflehead nest in tree cavities made by woodpeckers.

Merganser

Mergus serrator

Mergansers are species of ducks specially adapted to swimming underwater and catching fish. Their long serrated bill is their most distinct feature; it allows them to hold on to slippery fish. Male Red-breasted Merganser have a greenish-black crested head and reddish breast band that sets them apart from Common Merganser, which have a white breast. The female Red-breasted Merganser has a brown head that blends into its whitish throat. The female Common Merganser has a darker russet head that sharply contrasts with its breast. The rare Hooded Merganser male has a dramatic black and white crest; the female is darker than other mergansers and has a dark brown bill.

Gull

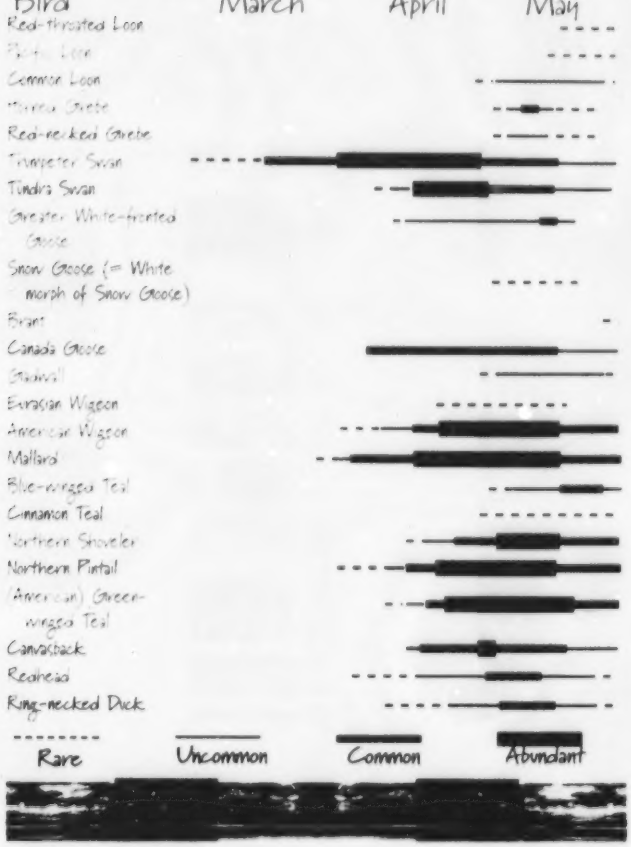


Bonaparte's Gull and Mew Gull are both much smaller than the better known Herring Gull. The Bonaparte's Gull has graphic plumage: a black beak, black head, red legs and a white neck and body. Mew Gull has a small, unspotted yellow bill, a grey mantle and black wing tips. Male and female gulls wear the same plumage but immature birds can be spotted by their darker mottled colour. Bonaparte's Gull average 33 centimetres in length. Mew Gull average 40.6 centimetres and Herring Gull average 63.5 centimetres.

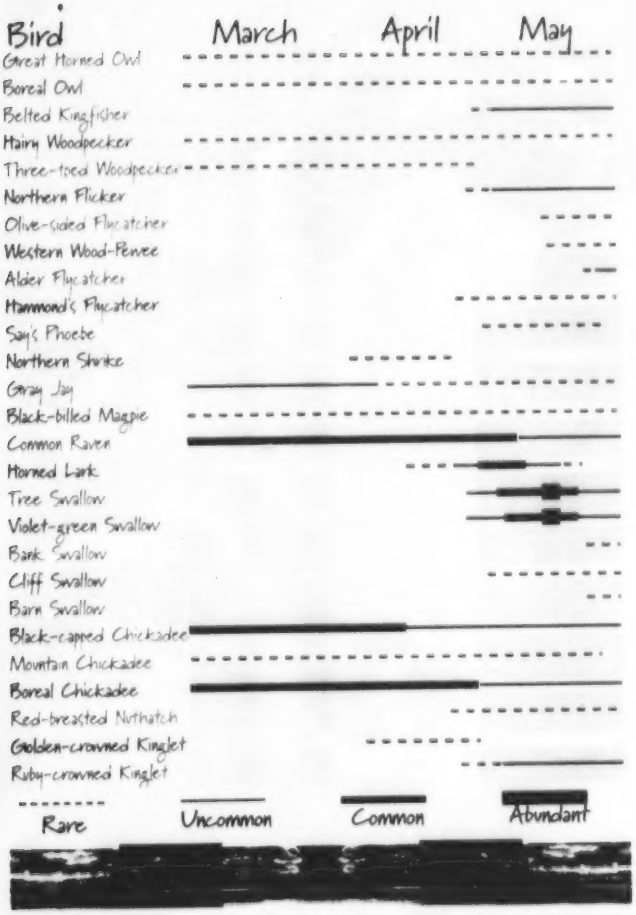
Arctic Tern

Sterna paradisaea

Arctic Tern are the world's long distance champions. These terns breed in the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions of the Northern Hemisphere and then winter in the oceans of the Southern Hemisphere, as far south as the Antarctic Circle. They spend most of their life in the air. Their graceful forked tails and sharp, trilling voice distinguish them from gulls. Their unusual wing shape is designed for long distance flights and allows them to hover over schools of fish until they dive and catch their prey.

Spring bird viewing at Swan Haven

Bird
March
April
May
Greater Scaup
Lesser Scaup
Harlequin Duck
Surf Scoter
White-winged Scoter
Long-tailed Duck
Bufflehead
Common Goldeneye
Barrow's Goldeneye
Common Merganser
Red-breasted Merganser
Osprey
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Northern Goshawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Rough-legged Hawk
American Kestrel
Merlin
Peregrine Falcon
Ruffed Grouse
Spruce Grouse
American Coot
Sandhill Crane
Black-bellied Plover
American Golden-Plover
Rare
Uncommon
Common
Abundant

Bird
March
April
May
Semipalmated Plover
Killdeer
Greater Yellowlegs
Lesser Yellowlegs
Solitary Sandpiper
Spotted Sandpiper
Whimbrel
Hudsonian Godwit
Sanderling
Semipalmated Sandpiper
Western Sandpiper
Least Sandpiper
White-rumped Sandpiper
Baird's Sandpiper
Pectoral Sandpiper
Dunlin
Stilt Sandpiper
Short-billed Dowitcher
Long-billed Dowitcher
Common Snipe
Wilson's Phalarope
Red-necked Phalarope
Bonaparte's Gull
Mew Gull
Herring Gull
Glaucous Gull
Arctic Tern
Rare
Uncommon
Common
Abundant


Bird
March
April
May
Great Horned Owl
Boreal Owl
Belted Kingfisher
Hairy Woodpecker
Three-toed Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Olive-sided Flycatcher
Western Wood-Pewee
Alder Flycatcher
Hammond's Flycatcher
Say's Phoebe
Northern Shrike
Gray Jay
Black-billed Magpie
Common Raven
Horned Lark
Tree Swallow
Violet-green Swallow
Bank Swallow
Cliff Swallow
Barn Swallow
Black-capped Chickadee
Mountain Chickadee
Boreal Chickadee
Red-breasted Nuthatch
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Rare
Uncommon
Common
Abundant

Bird
March
April
May
Mountain Bluebird
Swainson's Thrush
American Robin
Varied Thrush
American Pipit
Bohemian Waxwing
Yellow Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Blackpoll Warbler
Northern Waterthrush
Common Yellowthroat
Wilson's Warbler
American Tree Sparrow
Chipping Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Fox Sparrow
Lincoln's Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow
Golden-crowned Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Lapland Longspur
Snow Bunting
Red-winged Blackbird
Rusty Blackbird
Brown-headed Cowbird
Pine Grosbeak
Purple Finch
Rare
Uncommon
Common
Abundant